

January 30, 2012

Senator Richard Blumenthal  
702 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Blumenthal,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, who represent the victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking nationwide, as well as the professionals who serve them, we write this letter to express our support for the Internet Abuse, Stalking, and Domestic Violence Prevention Act of 2011 (“Internet Abuse Act”), and to urge swift passage of this legislation.

The Internet is an incredible tool for commerce, information sharing, and freedom of expression. Unfortunately, as the Internet has evolved, it has also provided criminals with a new medium for harassment, stalking, and other crimes of violence. Experts have identified thousands of cases over the past decade where individuals have used the Internet for these purposes.

The ease of information dissemination over the Internet makes it easier than ever to facilitate the serious and widespread harassment of an individual by third parties with the mere click of a mouse. Moreover, the easy anonymity afforded by the Internet has led to the emergence of impersonation crimes, where a perpetrator will pose as his or her victim online, releasing personal information about the victim in an attempt to induce third parties into abusing him or her.

These and other characteristics of Internet facilitation have created new challenges for law enforcement and have exposed gaps in current law. While cases where a criminal directly stalks, assaults, or abuses a victim can generally be reached under current law, it can be more difficult for prosecutors to make cases against perpetrators who indirectly abuse victims by using the Internet to induce third party individuals into engaging in such conduct.

The difficulties in prosecuting Internet-related crimes of violence have led many states to enact some form of cyberstalking legislation that provides local law enforcement with more precise authority to prosecute those who use the Internet to facilitate these crimes. Nearly half of the states, however, have enacted no such provision. Federal law has also not kept pace with this emerging technology, leaving law enforcement without the means to pursue these facilitators in all cases.

The Internet Abuse Act addresses this growing problem by creating narrowly tailored and carefully crafted tools that will allow prosecutors to fully and fairly pursue criminals who use the Internet to deliberately release personal information about potential victims, where those criminals intend for a third party to use that information to commit a federal crime like stalking, sexual assault, and domestic abuse.

The Act would also update federal online harassment law in two vital ways. First, it closes a loophole in current law to ensure that individuals who use the Internet anonymously to induce others to harass victims do not escape justice. Second, to ensure that limited prosecutorial resources are not wasted on frivolous cases, it ensures that prosecutors can only bring these cases where such Internet communications are intended to abuse, threaten, or harass – and not merely to annoy.

We commend you for your leadership on this important issue, and urge the Senate to swiftly enact the Internet Abuse Act to protect millions of potential victims nationwide from those who would use the Internet to facilitate stalking, domestic violence, sexual assault, and other heinous crimes.

Sincerely,

A CALL TO MEN

American Probation and Parole Association  
Americans Overseas Domestic Violence Crisis Center  
Asian and Pacific Islander Institute  
Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies  
Association of Prosecuting Attorneys  
Black Women's Health Imperative  
Break the Cycle  
Casa de Esperanza  
Church Women United  
Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services  
Disciples Justice Action Network  
Disciples Women of the Christian Church  
Faith Trust Institute  
Feminist Majority  
Fox Valley Voices of Men  
Futures Without Violence  
Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American  
Community  
International Association of Forensic Nurses  
Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
Jewish Women International  
Legal Momentum  
National Domestic Violence Hotline  
National Alliance to End Sexual Violence  
National Center for Victims of Crime  
National Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs  
National Council of Jewish Women

National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges  
National Council of the Churches of Christ  
National Council of Women's Organizations  
National Legal Aid and Defender Association  
National Network to End Domestic Violence  
National Organization for Women  
National Organization of Sisters of Color Ending Sexual Assault  
National Resource Sharing Project  
National Women's Political Caucus  
Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape  
Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network  
Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law  
Service Women's Action Network  
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S.  
The Women of Color Network  
United Church of Christ  
United Methodist General Board of Church & Society  
United Methodist Women  
Whisper N Thunder, Inc.  
Women's Information Network  
Women's Law Project